

Legislators wrap up nuclear talks

By Judy Fahys

The Salt Lake Tribune

Article Launched: 11/15/2007 01:10:31 AM MST

Lawmakers wrapped up a months-long discussion of nuclear power Wednesday with comments from two critics.

Noting that he is not an expert but an ordinary citizen, Provo resident James O'Neal told the Public Utilities and Technology Committee about the risks, the costs and the political sensitivity that Utah would face if nuclear reactors come to the state.

"I do think I represent the people of Utah," said the former Tennessee resident who described how the addition of nuclear power there brought higher electric rates.

"Utah doesn't need nuclear power. We have plenty of resources."

Christopher Thomas, policy director of the Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah, said higher-than-expected costs for reactors have driven Utahns away from nuclear in the months lawmakers have been discussing it. He cited polls, including *The Salt Lake Tribune's* Nov. 11 opinion survey showing that many Utahns are not sold on nuclear reactors.

Thomas cited a recent Moody's investment analysis that suggests nuclear plants will cost more than the projected \$2 billion to \$3 billion - more like \$4 billion to \$5 billion - to build.

There are no commercial nuclear reactors within Utah's borders. But Republican Rep. Aaron Tilton, of Springville, is involved in a proposal to construct the first two, and GOP Rep. Mike Noel of Kanab's water district has sold water rights for the project.

Members of the committee considered a bill this summer that would have streamlined the process for nuclear plant rate plans, including allowing reactor operators to charge ratepayers the costs of an unfinished nuclear plant. The legislation is modeled on a Florida law.

fahys@sltrib.com